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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 002135

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/LOGGERFO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/25/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [KDEM](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ABBAS SETS DEADLINE FOR "NATIONAL DIALOGUE"

REF: JERUSALEM 01917

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Representatives from Fatah, Hamas, other Palestinian factions, and civil society convened May 25 in Ramallah and Gaza City for a two-day session of "National Dialogue." In his speech before conference delegates in Ramallah, Palestinian President Abbas (Abu Mazen) set a 10-day deadline, commencing May 26, for participants to reach consensus on the basis of the "National Accord Document" drafted by Palestinian prisoners (reftel). Abbas warned conferees that he would refer the prisoners' document to a Palestinian national referendum within 40 days if the 10-day deadline expires without agreement. ConGen Palestinian contacts praised Abbas' speech and his decision to go forward with a possible referendum, noting that the threat alone would put considerable pressure on Hamas. End summary.

"National Dialogue" Convenes
With Abbas Threat of Referendum

¶2. (C) The "National Dialogue" convened May 25 with calls from PA and PLO officials, including Hamas PM Isma'il Haniyyah and PLC Speaker Aziz Dweik for "national unity." In his address, Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) imposed a 10-day deadline, commencing May 26, for delegates to accept the terms put forward in the "National Accord Document" signed by Palestinian prisoners earlier this month.

Abbas told attendees that, in the face of the dangerous situation facing Palestinians, he could not allow the "dialogue" to continue indefinitely. Describing the Palestinian prisoners as serving the "highest" national interests, Abbas said that he would initiate a national referendum in 40 days if participants could not agree reach agreement on the basis of the prisoners' document within 10 days.

¶3. (C) Abbas covered a number of issues in his speech, including:

-- Intra-Palestinian Strife: Abbas applauded PM Haniyyah's earlier speech in which the Hamas PM said that his government would work to protect national unity and ease tension by avoiding intra-Palestinian bloodshed.

-- Permanent Status Issues: Abbas outlined his support for the creation of a Palestinian state within 1967 borders, support for the Roadmap, resolution to the refugees issue on the basis of UN Resolution 194, and the sanctity of previous international resolutions.

-- PLO: Abbas emphasized the primacy of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, noting

in particular the February 2005 Cairo Understandings adherence to this principle. He called for restructuring the PLO to include the participation of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Fayyad/Erekat: National Dialogue Represents Strong First Step

¶4. (C) In comments to the Consul General, Salam Fayyad May 25 described the "National Dialogue" as the start of a political process. He expressed some reservations with parts of the prisoners' document, in particular, the absence of a strong statement against violence. Fayyad also conceded that the prisoners' document as it currently stands does not meet the terms put forth by the Quartet, but argued that the document does refer to "a strong national government that enjoys . . . international support." Fayyad opined that Hamas is not in favor of the prisoners' initiative and would therefore attempt to drag out the discussions and avoid making any concessions. Fayyad added that he would speak before the "National Dialogue" conference and express his support for President Abbas.

¶5. (C) PLO Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat May 25 told the Consul General that the prisoners' initiative provided the vehicle to force the creation of a new government that would support the Quartet requirements. He described the "National Dialogue" as a "process" to isolate Hamas. Erekat described Abbas' speech as effective, noting that many in the audience were surprised by Abbas' 10-day deadline to reach consensus on the prisoners' document.

Fatah Officials Optimistic

¶6. (C) Reacting to Abbas' "National Dialogue" speech, Fatah Tanzim leader Husayn al-Shaykh May 25 told POL FSN Specialist that he supported Abbas' call for a national referendum and expected that the Palestinian public would support the initiative by a wide margin. Al-Shaykh thought that Hamas, despite its reservations with the document, would be under pressure to endorse it out of fear of being perceived as opposing the will of the Palestinian prisoners. He noted that Shaykh 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Natshah, a member of the Hamas political bureau, had already endorsed the document from Israeli prison along with Fatah leader Marwan Barghuti and other faction representatives. He predicted that Hamas would seek changes to the document in order to avoid a potential split within Hamas.

¶7. (C) Former Fatah PLC member Qadurra Faris echoed al-Shaykh's comments and agreed with Abbas' approach. Faris suggested that the prisoners' document emphasized the relevancy of Barghuti in the Palestinian political arena. He also expected that Hamas would have a difficult time opposing the document since the prisoners, including Barghuti and Hamas' Shaykh al-Natshah have already endorsed it. He expected that Hamas would seek to make changes to the document over the next 10 days in an effort to avoid a national referendum.

¶8. (C) FIDA Secretary General and PLO-EC member Saleh Ra'fat, told POL FSN that his faction supported Abbas and the prisoners' document. He thought that Hamas would come under pressure to support the proposal in its current form. Ra'fat expressed hope that the agreement on the prisoners' document would provide the way out of the current international opposition to the Hamas-led PA.

Next Steps

¶9. (C) The "National Dialogue" is slated to reconvene at 1700L May 25 for additional speeches. Following the speeches, conference participants are expected to appoint delegates to the committees that will address the prisoners' document. The delegates are scheduled to begin discussions

on the basis of the prisoner's document on May 26.

Comment

¶10. (C) Abu Mazen's decision to embrace the prisoners' initiative will resonate well with the Palestinian public. At this stage, it is not clear how Hamas will react to Abu Mazen's move. The gap between the prisoners' initiative and the Quartet requirements will have to be bridged in order to deal with the international isolation brought about by the inauguration of a Hamas-led government. However, Abu Mazen's move has transformed the internal political debate and started a process that could lead to an end-game.

WALLES